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ABSTRACT

Effective strategies for developing early childhood centers in public schools are discussed in this paper, which draws from a research-based literature search and intensive case studies of six Northwest sites. The sites represent a range of rural, suburban, and urban programs; large and small schools; and a variety of program features. The sites are the: (1) Centennial Early Childhood Center, Portland, Oregon; (2) Mary Harrison Primary School, Toledo, Oregon; (3) Nome Elementary School, Nome, Alaska; (4) Ponderosa Elementary School, Billings, Montana; (5) South Colby Elementary School, Port Orchard, Washington; and (6) Tendoy Elementary School, Pocatello, Idaho. The paper begins by identifying themes, issues, and strategies involved in restructuring public schools around early childhood concerns. Among the themes are these: curriculum as a continuum of knowledge and thinking processes; curriculum content as resulting from a dynamic process that involves input from children, families, and community; children as active learners who make decisions about their learning activities; developmentally appropriate practice as a critical underpinning for program design and implementation; and high expectations for all learners in the diverse classroom. Issues are categorized in terms of school readiness, organizational or resource features, personnel, classrooms, family, communities, transition, comprehensive care, quality control, and administrative concerns. Strategies relating to each issue are described. Contains 38 references. (LB)

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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

February 1992

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EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR SCHOOL-BASED EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTERS

What does it take to effectively implement early childhood centers in public schools? The report of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) "Right From the Start" suggests that infusing public schools with sound early childhood practices is not simply a matter of adding "more" to educational systems, but rather altering the nature of these systems. Change, rather than refinement or augmentation, seems to be essential to the nature of this task. A recent survey of Northwest educators who have been successfully engaged in the process of developing early childhood centers in public elementary schools over the past several years supports this claim (Jewett, 1991). Educators describe comprehensive shifts in educational systems which coincide with their efforts to work toward early childhood programming.

If such changes are called for, what are the essential features involved in successful implementation of early childhood centers in public schools? What effective strategies have educators used or could they use in moving toward this goal?

For the purposes of studying effective strategies for developing school-based early childhood centers by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL), the concept of such centers must be clearly defined. The defining features of school-based early childhood centers, according to this study's current use, include: 1) adherence to quality parameters based on child development principles and developmentally appropriate practice as these apply to children through the age of eight; 2) active involvement and support of parents as partners in their child(ren)'s development and schooling; 3) active involvement with and responsiveness to the resources and needs of the community; and 4) a school-based commitment to educating preschoolers in the community either on-site or in collaborative relationships with preschool care providers. The rationale underlying these defining features is discussed in Jewett, 1991.

This paper has been drawn from an extensive research-based literature search reviewing critical features of effective early childhood practices, program reviews derived from a regional model program survey (Jewett, 1991), and more intensive case studies of six selected Northwest sites. These six sites, representing a range of rural, suburban and urban programs, larger and smaller schools, and a variety of program features, include the Centennial Early Childhood Center, Portland, Oregon, Mary Harrison Primary, Toledo, Oregon, Nome Elementary, Nome, Alaska, Ponderosa Elementary, Billings, Montana, South Colby Elementary, Port Orchard, Washington, and Tendoy Elementary, Pocatello, Idaho.

An initial outline of identified issues, drawn from the research synthesis, was used as a tool in working with a panel of professional educators from the six sites, each of whom demonstrated success in the task of developing early childhood centers in schools. These experts were asked to use this outline of identified issues to prioritize the issues in ways which could aid understanding of the importance, difficulty, and immediacy of dealing with particular concerns. They also analyzed and strategized about the ways in which these types of issues could be and have been addressed. The expertise and experiences of these and other educators, expressed during the panel activities, on-site in explaining the development of their own

programs, and through an extensive phone survey, are being used to inform the development of key issue areas. This emerging knowledge base will provide a substantive foundation for the articulation of a set of effective strategies for school-based early childhood centers.

This paper, then, represents an initial identification of themes, issues, and strategies which have been found to enter into the process of restructuring public schools around early childhood concerns. This initial identification will continue to be studied by the panel of expert practitioners. It will be refined and improved through a process of examination and analysis so that it can most closely represent a set of key elements and considerations which school organizations can use in addressing the substantive issues involved in incorporating sound early childhood practices and principles into public schools.

Critical Themes Impacting Early Childhood Restructuring

Several themes have emerged through the study of public schools participating in implementing early childhood centers. Clarifying these themes may help to characterize the extensive nature of the shifts in assumptions and practice which practitioners must make as they pursue goals related to early childhood implementation.

Curriculum and school practice become reconceptualized in the following ways.

- Curriculum becomes viewed as representing a continuum of knowledge and thinking processes. It is no longer viewed as a set of categories focused on content (such as reading, math, science, etc.) or on grade levels (first grade curriculum, second grade curriculum). The role of the teacher, then, becomes to match each child's developmental level of functioning, as well as individual capabilities in functioning, to the appropriate points along this continuum.

- The emergent nature of learning becomes understood in different ways. Learning is conceptualized as the pursuit of intellectual, rather than specifically academic, skills. The relationship of preschool children's experimental and playful activities such as drawing, scribbling, and "reading" story books is understood as providing significant and worthwhile contributions to the acquisition of literacy skills, for example. In the primary grades, play with blocks could be seen as a significant opportunity to pursue thinking skills related to science, math, and social studies.

- Identification of relevant curriculum "content" becomes a dynamic process in which children, families, and community provide crucial sources of input. The scope and sequence of curriculum is no longer planned primarily by experts, in advance, and implemented in specified chunks or units.

- Children are perceived as active learners who must make important, rather than trivial, decisions regarding their own learning activities and derive direct experience from the results of their own efforts.

- Developmentally appropriate practice is a critical underpinning for the design and implementation of programs affecting all children from 0 through 8.

- Schools recognize the many benefits of grouping students in ways which promote diversity rather than homogeneity. Classrooms and teachers develop structures and methods which are elastic in stretching to respond to the purposefully diverse set of students which they envelope.

- High expectations are established for all learners in the diverse classroom. Children are exposed to many and varied opportunities and their progress is carefully and effectively monitored, so that each child develops to their fullest potential.

- Educators come to view the process and outcomes of educational service provision from the client's point of view, examining provided experiences by questioning how well such strategies succeed from the point of view of children, families, and community.

- Program design is guided by efforts to promote appropriate, continuous experiences for children and families through integrated service provision.

- Schools operate by establishing and maintaining truly collaborative, partnership relationships with children, their families, and community representatives.

These themes represent major alterations in assumptions regarding public elementary education. Schools which shift from prior to new assumptions must make changes which reverberate throughout the system. Some of the issues which are impacted by this process of change have been identified below.

Key Issue Areas

The following outline of issues derives from a number of sources. Recent research (reviewed in Jewett, 1991) identifies numerous features which have been associated with "quality" early childhood education programs. Additional knowledge bases include the regional survey also summarized in the preceding reference. For this report, public school professionals who are experienced in the process of implementing early childhood centers in elementary schools reviewed and amended issues relating to implementation and quality identified by the research. Many of these additional issues represent challenges unique to the critical interface between early childhood precepts and public school assumptions and systems. Experienced administrators became acutely aware of these specific issues as they attempted to navigate a course of change for their school.

Categories of Issues

The previously cited review of recent research and policy statements about early childhood care and education suggests the existence of considerable consensus regarding the significant categories of issues which enter into quality implementation of early childhood programs, whether in or out of public schools. Each of these identified categories contributes to the effective integration of quality early childhood education in significant ways:

1. **Readiness**: Schools must prepare for such integration by developing motivation and a rationale for the changes which will be involved.

2. **Organizational/resource features**: It is necessary to consider important organizational issues such as how this type of change affects funds, facility use, and scheduling, in addition to the impact it may have on school structure issues such as how children and teachers are organized and grouped.

3. **Personnel**: Because this type of project affects the school so extensively, staffing issues become extremely involved.

4. **Classroom**: Appropriate classroom practices are a core issue in establishing early childhood centers in public schools, and involve a number of different features.

5. **Family**: The integration of early childhood education involves reexamination of the role of families in relation to schools.

6. **Communities**: Community involvement has also been identified as a critical facet of successful early childhood education.

7. **Transition**: Current thinking stresses the importance of transition processes, which facilitate the progress of children and families from one level or type of schooling to another and foster continuity from the family's point of view.

8. **Comprehensive care**: Quality early childhood education centers conceptualize the provision of integrated, comprehensive care for children and families as part of an effective, preventive educational approach.

9. **Quality control**: Assessing educational change through a concern for outcomes of implementation is a critical factor in monitoring successful educational intervention and is particularly important when implementing change in educational systems.

10. **Administrative concerns**: These are involved in all school-level change.

These ten categories have been used to organize the particular, significant issues relating to the development and implementation of successful, quality early childhood centers in public schools. A list of issues related to these categories was

presented to a panel of expert practitioners. This panel represents the leaders (principals, in most cases) from the model sites selected for advanced work in each of the five states in the region and is a group with which NWREL will work closely over the next two or more years. This panel selected from the set of issues those which they have identified as most critical to successful implementation according to three concerns: which issues are of most **importance** to the implementation of early childhood centers, which issues represent the greatest **difficulty**, and which efforts present the greatest **immediacy**. Their prioritizations of those issues which are most and least important as well as those which are most controversial (some raters ranked high, others ranked low), are summarized in Appendix 1. The identified issues were then analyzed by the group in terms of **barriers**, **resources**, and **strategies**.

Effective Strategies for School-Based Early Childhood Centers

Study has revealed a wide array of creative approaches to dealing with early childhood restructuring by developing strategies for dealing with specific arenas of change in ways that are locally appropriate. Identified strategies for the ways in which schools have addressed specific issues in their pursuit of sound early childhood practices are described below. These strategies are presented according to a set of issues which have been grouped into the ten categories described above.

1. Strategies for Fostering School Readiness

Certain issues are critical in setting the stage for and sustaining change efforts. A school staff must do a considerable amount of work to accomplish changes which enable the effective implementation of sound early childhood practices to occur. Among the issues which expert practitioners agree must be taken into account are motivation, joint establishment of vision and philosophy, and joint establishment of a view of children and families. These issues provide the impetus and the direction for the continuing efforts which will follow.

Motivation:

> *The school/staff need a reason to make the efforts required to move in the direction of effective early childhood implementation. What motivations impel staff to do this work?*

A variety of "facilitating factors" which motivated schools and school staff to move in the direction of implementing early childhood practices have been identified. State and/or district support of change, such as state sponsored early childhood restructuring projects, self study of developmentally appropriate practice groups, and professional early childhood conferences, district sponsored coursework or task force opportunities are among these. Principals have exerted great leadership by encouraging staff to study research, question traditional practices, and take the risks associated with programmatic innovation.

School staff have also functioned in this motivating role by reporting on professional development activities such as conferences and by spearheading review of school practices through research studies. Motivation for change has come through staff study and evaluation activity, in which educators examine their practices and the resulting outcomes and determine that it is time to make a change. Successful innovation of early childhood practices at the kindergarten level in schools can filter through to impact the teaching strategies and assumptions of other primary

teachers. Emergent needs of clients, similarly, can represent stimulus for change, when schools discover that certain needs are going unmet.

Some principals assisted their staff by accessing information regarding the change process itself and helping staff break through barriers to thinking in new ways.

Expert practitioners report that "seeing the need", staying child centered, and being able to pay attention in a nondefensive way to "what's not working" are some key factors in providing the impetus to move forwards in this direction. Interpersonal structures such as committees, school-wide immersions, or cross-grade theming or cooperative activities build exposure among staff to new approaches and ideas, particularly across grade levels and among staff who serve different roles in the school. These structures encourage staff to share concerns and build on common ground.

Vision and philosophy:

> *The school needs to develop an image of what the purpose, functions, and extent of the change will be, as well as a set of shared values and expectations about the purpose, functions, and range of acceptable methods.*

Expert practitioners confirmed unanimously that this factor is of highest importance and of high immediacy in a school's pursuit of change around the issue of early childhood education. Establishment of an atmosphere of trust and openness, acceptance, and professionalism, were identified as precursors to the building of a joint vision and commonly accepted philosophy. Inclusion of students, all staff, and preferably families and community in the development of vision and philosophy statements is an important strategy. Use of National Association for the Education of Young Children's Developmentally Appropriate Practices (Bredekamp, 1987) was used by one school as a springboard for the development of a set of "core values" which the staff used to further develop and articulate their philosophy and program goals. Use of opportunities for staff time together to do vision-building and philosophical clarification by scheduling a weekend retreat or finding the funding and opportunity for a "practitioner's workshop" or other funded support for school improvement activities was identified as an essential and successful strategy as well. As mentioned above, cross school committees or jointly shared school-wide projects provide valuable opportunities to nurture joint vision and philosophy development and articulation.

View of children and families:

> *A set of shared concepts about the nature of the clients being served and the nature of the relationship between clients and school is essential to the creation of a new form of school-based service. Because family involvement is a fundamental feature of early childhood programs, in particular, schools often must reevaluate the role families play.*

A reconceptualization of the relationship between the child, the family, and the school often emerges from the development of vision, assessment of needs, and study of the role of parent partnerships in the early childhood period. Needs assessment activities, family surveys, and/or careful interviews with parents can contribute to this process. Pursuit of linked comprehensive service provision, in which the school system collaborated with human service providers to assist families in getting client-centered and coordinated services, fostered this reconceptualization in one school setting. Respecting family strengths in contributing to children's

progress, recognizing the importance of the family as the child's first and foremost teacher, and viewing parents in a partnership rather than a potentially adversarial role were themes mentioned by practitioners. Inservice support can be useful in helping staff explore their feelings, concerns and issues regarding work with families.

Increasing communication flow among school members and community was acknowledged as a crucial strategy. Open houses, news articles and newsletters, an "open door" policy in which families and community members are always welcome, flexible event scheduling which does not exclude working parents, home visits, telephone warmlines, positive notes home, and inviting bulletin boards and family resource rooms or areas, are some strategies for increasing communication, inclusiveness, and mutual understanding.

2. Strategies for Dealing with Organizational and Resource Features

Basic organizational features such as the ways in which resources are deployed as well as the limits on resources such as buildings, classrooms and budgets can have a significant impact on the potential of schools to change. Policies and issues related to facilities, finances, class groupings, and scheduling issues have been identified as important issues in pursuing the implementation of early childhood principles in school settings.

Facilities:

What additional facilities are needed? More space, particular types of space, special or different equipment and/or other resources? Will transportation needs be increased and/or changed?

The expert practitioners who reviewed the identified issues ranked this as having lower importance than many other concerns. However, it also was rated as one of the most difficult issues to deal with. Limited facilities were not seen as a true impediment to the process of early childhood restructuring. However, because of their permanence and inflexibility, facility limitations can represent thorny and often intractable problems. Strategies which have been successfully used by schools have been to obtain funds to knock out permanent walls and replace them with flexible ones between classrooms which wanted to engage in teaching and learning collaborations and for carpeting and installing bookcases and other shelving that is more accessible to children. One school district utilized an empty, unused school building to open a family centered facility, renting out space to a Head Start program, sponsoring a Steps to Success program for teenage parents, and implementing a developmentally appropriate early childhood center. Another school which had no preschool programs for low income families available in the community knocked out the walls between two closets on the ground floor in order to start such a preschool program on site.

The expert panel recommended that staff work to "remove blinders about how we group and use space".

Finances:

What types of additional funding resources will be needed? For what purposes? Will additional staff have to be hired? Will current staff need expensive staff development? Will the school need to invest in major new curriculum supplies and resources? What are the differences between initial start-up and ongoing increased expenses?

This area was acknowledged as an area of high difficulty for the study sites engaged in implementing the early childhood center concept. Although not ranked as highly important or immediate, in the sense that additional finances are not necessary to begin to pursue this process, additional funds are desirable and difficult to obtain. Successful programs have been vigilant about hunting for and finding funding, primarily through state-financed grant opportunities. Some programs also have principals who engage in high visibility activities which garner attention and support for innovative school practices.

Educators agree that some flexibility with finances is critical. The most frequently cited expenditures include purchase of developmentally appropriate materials, contracting for specific, locally appropriate staff development opportunities, and money to buy staff time so that the staff can meet together to develop the curriculum integrations, philosophy and vision, new program modifications, or case staffings necessary to help the restructuring move forward. Buying substitute time to enable teachers to observe other innovative programs has also been identified as an extremely valuable investment because it provides teachers with concrete images of success for what may be perceived as risky practices. One principal felt that all teachers should be funded to attend one national and one local conference a year and that every school making these changes should have five to ten thousand dollars to spend at their own discretion. "Teachers need to be able to branch out".

Programs have identified ways to get around some funding issues. A school which started its own preschool program was able to get a small, local corporate grant for start-up materials and costs and now is able to support much of the program through tuition on a sliding scale. Schools have recruited and developed reciprocal relationships with local businesses and community members who donate time, money, and resources to school functioning. When schools move away from textbooks, they free up money to purchase manipulatives and other flexible materials. Educators have also acknowledged the expertise and commitment among their own staff and have successfully used in-service days to train each other from their own areas of expertise.

Class groupings:

> *How will classes be organized? Some schools working around early childhood restructuring are moving toward blended, ungraded, or mixed-age groupings and types of combined classes with team teaching.*

As noted above, the trend towards recognizing diversity of student groupings and the need for continuity as important contributors to successful learning outcomes has a very meaningful impact on classroom groupings and the ways that schools are organized. Early childhood centers demonstrate many strategies for increasing the diversity and continuity of their class groupings. "Push in" as opposed to pull out programs which maximize the involvement of special needs students in classrooms increase learning diversity and make learning opportunities more continuous for the identified students. "Buddy reading" or mixed age tutoring types of programs encourage ways of increasing the exposure of different ages of children to each other in a systematic fashion. One school restructured its lunch program to allow children to eat in stable mixed-age family groupings with the same teacher over the course of the year. These cross-age opportunities are acknowledged by school staff as having a very positive impact on the whole school atmosphere by reducing competition and tension on playgrounds and at bus stops, for example, and by increasing supportive, cooperative behaviors.

Blended and multiage classrooms represent a response to the importance of diversity and continuity. Ungraded primaries are another. One principal articulated some of the many benefits of the ungraded classroom: 1) it encourages the understanding of curriculum as a continuous process, 2) it provides continuity for students and staff, 3) students develop at different rates and the ungraded classroom allows for a wider span of growth, 4) retentions become unnecessary, 5) it encourages integration of special education students and the development of in class models, 6) it provides opportunities for teacher teaming, and 7) it increases continuity and reduces the typical adjustment time required in the fall of each year. "Continuous classrooms" in which the teacher stays with a group of children and moves up the grade levels with them from one year to the next represents another response to the concern for continuity, especially for at-risk children.

Scheduling:

> *Because time is a critical resource, alterations in school assumptions and methods have a major impact on the use of time in early childhood centers. How must schools utilize time differently as restructuring occurs?*

The goals of the early childhood center approach also impact scheduling. The intent to increase classroom diversity by regularly affording groups of children opportunities to interact with other school groups requires coordinated scheduling. Goals of integrating curriculum and coordinating themes, planning and implementing school immersions, and planning for programmatic innovation and change, for example, all require coordinated teaching schedules which allow for increased staff meeting time. "Push in" programs for special needs students change the way the resource staff organize their time.

Some schools, through the process of prioritizing school learning goals, have restructured their scheduling around issues. For example, one school wanted to maximize the student/staff ratio for reading. They restructured the school schedule so that every staff person in the building, including the principal and the gym teacher, for example, spends a certain amount of time every day in a classroom assisting with reading. Another school, attempting to increase continuity for their youngest students, developed a strategy for reducing transition time by developing the policy of "keeping them on the road". Once students had to leave the classroom for a scheduled activity, the effort was made to contiguously schedule other out-of-room activities. Another school has made a commitment to an "exploration period" which ensures that all children in primary classrooms have at least one significant period a day in which to explore and develop their own ideas and learning pursuits.

Because time is such a crucial resource to staff pursuing early childhood restructuring, district policies regarding scheduling can have a significant impact on the progress of these efforts. The way inservice or planning time is viewed can be facilitating or inhibiting. For example, one principal cited the district's decision to count staff release time in minutes rather than hours or days as having a very inhibiting effect on the progress the staff was able to make, since little significant inservice work could be accomplished in brief periods of time. Another district, in contrast, supported a school in the decision to develop an early release program in which students left school early on Monday afternoons so that teachers could plan and develop the strategies they wished to pursue for school improvement. Administrative support of time for staff to pursue staff development and school improvement activities has been identified as a significant factor in the success of restructuring efforts.

3. Strategies for Dealing with Personnel Features

The most agreed-upon predictor of quality in the implementation of early childhood education programs is the quality of adult-child interactions. Staff thus represent a critical category in the consideration of effective implementation of quality early childhood centers.

Staff qualifications:

What kinds of certification issues arise when early childhood education enters the public schools? How do state certification requirements support or inhibit progress towards development of staff with specific early childhood expertise?

Expert practitioners agree that in order to achieve school change, you must have whole staff buy-in. Since the types of comprehensive changes described affect all staff, participation by all staff in the implementation of the process is essential. This compels the process of change to be inclusive of all school staff, including instructional assistants, resource staff, and significant volunteers. The process of inclusion, tied to staff development and decision-making activities, can serve a very empowering function for school participants who start out with less professional expertise.

Qualities of staff which were identified by the panel of expert practitioners as desirable include staff willingness to cooperate with peers, representation among the staff of expertise in the area of early childhood education, and, ideally, the presence of some risk takers. A team approach to staff development and to hiring represents a useful strategy to building a school-wide commitment to early childhood program development.

Staff development:

What types of out-of-school and in-school educational experiences are necessary and/or desirable in promoting quality early childhood education implementation? How extensive/frequent/intensive do these experiences need to be? Of what types?

Staff development was identified by the panel as of high importance and critical immediacy in the process of early childhood restructuring. As noted above, state and district sponsored staff development opportunities contribute significantly to the effectiveness of restructuring efforts. Time and money, also discussed above, are important contributors as well.

The expert practitioner panel identified the value of creating a staff development plan (Olson, et.al., 1991). Since most public school personnel have not received specific early childhood training, it should be an ongoing expectation of schools and school districts that this expertise will need to be gained through in-service vehicles. Such a plan, then, would continue to evolve and offer meaningful and ongoing opportunities to the novice, developing, and expert early childhood teachers among the affected staff.

Identifying trainers who are knowledgeable, respected, and have expertise and experience is a critical strategy. Leadership judgment is also important in selecting important research for staff to review and in identifying the most critical articles to read. Locating innovative programs which can provide opportunities for teachers to

visit and observe as well as offering experience in the kinds of issues raised by particular changes being considered is another important strategy.

Developing a collegial atmosphere among all staff and parents, sharing concerns for the best interest of children, and providing a supportive environment in which teachers receive support and encouragement for their efforts are valuable strategies. A multi-pronged staff development plan is recommended, which offers staff a diverse menu of options for increased expertise: peer coaching, site visits, consultants, technological sources such as videotapes, attendance at workshops and conferences, review of literature, and sharing of in-staff expertise through cross grade dialogue, staff "show and tell", and group celebrations of school success. These are all important sources for professional growth.

Sharing staff development opportunities with other members of the early childhood community, human service providers, or other collaborators, is a valued strategy which affords many benefits. Principals also identified an effective strategy of frequent sharing of staff development opportunities which come across their desk: by routing to a particular teacher's box, writing notes, and posting on a staff development bulletin board, as well as announcements at staff meetings.

Staff empowerment and decision-making:

> *Early childhood education implementation, as other forms of instruction, requires extensive skilled decision-making on a daily basis. Schools which incorporate early childhood practices typically develop empowering procedures in which staff make and need to implement significant decisions regularly. What types of decisions can be made on-site? What structures do schools need to alter or establish in order to move in this direction?*

Staff empowerment and staff decision-making were identified unanimously as of critical importance and critical immediacy in relationship to school level efforts at early childhood restructuring. The need for a common philosophy, vision, and view of children and families and the need for collaborative, collegial relationships and cross-grade interactions as they impact the process of change, are strongly related to the importance of staff decision-making. As one principal stated: "Teachers need to feel safe, in control, and have the chance to promote open, cooperative peer relationships". In addition, the importance of children's opportunities to make significant decisions and exercise autonomy in the course of their learning is most appreciated by teachers who also can exercise those capabilities themselves.

District sponsored restructuring around site-based management can serve as an important facilitator of this process. Equally, districts that discourage "decisions made at the site" can impede the progress of innovation and risk taking. One principal who deals with this discouragement yet continues to pursue innovations at the school site offered the following strategy: "Ask forgiveness, not permission".

Useful strategies in promoting this type of empowerment and decision-making include helping teachers learn how to develop and exercise decision-making and problem solving skills. As one educational leader noted "The teachers in my building were so used to an autocratic management style when I arrived that they only knew how to identify problems and leave them to the administration to solve." This principal spent a year helping staff to become involved in considering options and selecting a plan to respond to problems which they had identified.

Leadership development and staff advocacy skills are also areas for staff development which can contribute to the staff empowerment process. Developing staff lead committees which have decision-making power over crucial school issues and encouraging collaboration and communication among all stake-holders in any educational decision also foster these types of empowerments.

Making the time and the priority for staff to get together and provide significant input into school issues is a crucial feature. The development of shared vision and philosophy interact with this function. Promoting teamwork and cohesion sustains school efforts. As one principal stated "We stick together like glue".

Teacher flexibility and willingness to change:

> *Developing an early childhood center requires a significant amount of school change and necessitates an uncomfortable period of transition for the school and staff. Are staff willing to change and do they demonstrate some of the resilience, motivation and flexibility which will assist in the process of adapting the work place and work tasks as necessary? How can these qualities be nurtured in staff?*

Targeted as of critical importance and critical immediacy in the process of implementing early childhood change, this function interacts with motivation, professional commitment, professional development, and an atmosphere in which trust, sensitivity, and encouragement are operating features. Strategies which encourage teachers to take risks and study the consequences in a blame-free, supportive environment are useful. Administrators can support this process by demonstrating their belief that the staff want to change, by modeling risk taking themselves (e.g., "walk the talk"), and by serving themselves as advocates for their staff. Site leaders serve important functions in supporting willingness to change by buffering school staff from discouraging influences and promoting and protecting innovative efforts in the broader community.

District support and backing assists in the process of teaching innovation. Access to staff development funds at the building level is an invaluable resource.

Studying the change process can be a very helpful strategy (Hord, et.al, 1987; Wasley, 1991). Change needs to be safe and slow, so that all teachers can remain within their own comfort zone. Teachers need to see the potential for success and be able to ease into the process. Sensitivity to variations in staff ability to change and innovate is also important--staff need to feel valued even if they are unable to move as fast as some of their colleagues. Staying in touch with district administration and concerned community players can facilitate change efforts, also.

Performance evaluation:

> *Modes of staff evaluation need to be modified to reflect the particular skills of the early childhood educator. What does the school, district, union need to do in order to accommodate the need for documentation of different types of professional skills?*

This area can have a crucial impact on teachers' defensiveness and, in a related fashion, their willingness to change. Districts can have varying criteria for assessing professional expertise. When developmentally appropriate practice is implemented, it elicits a different set of behaviors and skills from teachers which need to be reflected in the criteria by which they are to be evaluated. Effective management skills for active, developmentally appropriate classrooms must be assessed

differently. Expert practitioners agree that it is no longer appropriate to have one set of criteria to apply to teachers of all age levels. Administrators must develop new skills at assessing effective teaching performance in developmentally appropriate classrooms. Deriving staff input into the process of performance evaluation can make this an integrated, consistent, and professionally relevant tool.

Careful goal setting and research of effective techniques which are incorporated into performance criteria are examples of ways in which administrators and districts can support implementation of quality early childhood practices. An understanding of teaching skills as being developmental and on a continuum can be modeled by district policies. For example, safeguards must be established which protect teachers who are implementing innovative practices. Districts can offer to waive evaluations for a period during the change process and work to ensure that hiring threats do not prevent change from happening. Interacting with state departments as a resource for developing consistent, developmentally appropriate performance evaluation standards and methods is another useful strategy in dealing with this function.

4. Strategies for Dealing with Changing Classrooms

Changing the ways in which children interact in schools lies at the heart of the early childhood restructuring process. Careful attention must be focused on the ways and means by which classrooms change to afford children access to the elements of quality early childhood education implementation. What strategies have been identified as useful and successful supports for classroom change? The issues of curriculum innovation, developmentally appropriate practice, classroom diversity, special needs, and language focus have been identified and analyzed as critical features of this category.

Curriculum innovation:

> *Early childhood education draws on a different set of assumptions and precepts than elementary education commonly does, although these fields are not unrelated and innovations are common to both. Typical innovations include whole-language approaches, thematic integrated units, interest centers, and cooperative learning techniques. What types and what extent of classroom modifications will be necessary to implement quality early childhood centers which incorporate some of these innovations?*

Staff efforts and interest in the area of classroom innovation have represented a significant impetus for early childhood restructuring. Rated as having critical importance to the process of early childhood restructuring, classroom innovation lies at the heart of efforts to incorporate sound early childhood research-based practices into public schools. Major categories of curriculum innovation which staff have studied which have supported movement towards more developmentally appropriate practice have included the study of whole language, cooperative learning techniques, thematic teaching, integrated curriculum approaches, and manipulative math curriculums including Math Their Way (Baratta-Lorton, 1976), Box It and Bag It (Burk, Snyder and Simmons), and Math in the Mind's Eye (Math Learning Center). Global awareness, creative writing and journaling, inventive spelling, school wide immersions, cross-grade collaborations among teachers and/or students, and the development of learning stations or activity centers are curricular approaches which have supported teaching efforts to develop appropriate practices. Additional programs cited by expert practitioners as having value include Reading

Recovery (Clay, 1985; Pinnell) Success in Reading and Writing (Appleman, 1991), and Talents Unlimited (Mobile, Alabama).

One expert practitioner cautioned that innovation must be balanced with refinement. Validating the effectiveness of innovative practices keeps schools accountable for outcomes. It is important to be able to show and measure new applications by identifying desired outcomes and monitoring child progress in ways which are consistent with current thinking about appropriate modes of assessment. Principles which underlie this approach to assessing outcomes include the importance of a comprehensive system of assessment, the inclusion of multiple assessment perspectives and methods, attention in assessment processes to multiple domains of child development and outcomes, and periodic collection of assessment data (National Education Goals Panel, 1991).

Developmentally appropriate practice:

> *How responsive can school practices be to the typical and individual developmental needs of each child in the early childhood center? What modifications will the school and staff need to make to provide such responsiveness?*

If curriculum innovation lies at the heart of the implementation of early childhood restructuring, the concept of developmentally appropriate practice provides the rationale and guiding force for the selection and monitoring of efforts at implementation. Expert practitioners ranked this function as of highest importance in public school early childhood efforts. Probably the single most useful resource in this area has been the document *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children Birth Through Age 8* (Bredekamp, 1987).

Staff study of this document and its meaning for application to teaching practice has been a critical strategy in pursuing developmental appropriateness. Consultants and trainers who can help staff examine and refine their teaching assumptions and practices represent another resource. Self-study documents (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1990; Severeide and Moilanen, 1991) are available to help teachers engage in this process, as well. Attendance at professional conferences which address developmentally appropriate practices helps staff question and refine their implementation of this concept.

All strategies described above as resources in staff development can be applied specifically to this issue as the guiding force behind determination of classroom practice.

Fostering classroom diversity:

> *How must the school adjust in order to embrace the diverse types of children and families represented in the population served? How can school staff, atmosphere and policies be modified to encourage such representativeness? How can the school help promote awareness of the additional diversity in existence beyond the school environment, and what is the extent of the school's responsibility in this endeavor?*

Purposely encouraging diverse groupings of children serves an important function in promising early childhood practices. Diversity of students with regard to age, sex, culture and background, and capabilities offers students the exposure to a variety of peer contacts and influences in maximally equitable, "least restrictive" settings. The earlier identified strategies associated with flexible classroom groupings apply to this

function. Resources are now becoming available on multiculturalism to assist in dealing with diversity (Carter, 1988; Derman-Sparks, 1989; Geertz, 1973; Jones, 1992). Community needs assessments, family interviews and survey methods, and collaborations with human service providers in the community can help to raise awareness of issues of cultural differences, social needs, family concerns, and other ways in which diverse elements could be addressed within the school setting. Seeking to increase the diversity of staff members can also assist the school in becoming more responsive to community perspectives and needs.

Responding to special needs:

What does the school need to do to respond effectively to the unique needs of challenged children (at-risk, special needs, ESL) who are in the early childhood period? Will this require program modifications?

Inclusive classrooms offer flexible environments which can foster early intervention and assimilation of young children with special needs. Often, responses to special needs students represent an entree for public school connections with Head Start and preschool programs as offering the least restrictive settings for preschoolers with special needs. "Push In" programs which serve special needs children in the "regular" classrooms benefit all children. A "Merge Model" designed by one school district takes a case management approach in which all service providers concerned with serving the needs of a particular child and family meet in a coordinated case study team approach.

Biweekly staffings and Child Study Teams can consider the emerging needs of young children in ways which assist the classroom staff to gain skills and understandings of their unique learning needs. Chapter 1 services have enabled kindergarten coordinators to collaborate with prekindergarten programs in order to focus on early intervention and effective referral and transition services. Chapter 1 funds have also been utilized to organize school-wide support services for children and families with particular intervention needs.

Educators who have monitored their school's work towards implementing early childhood restructuring have reported that the focus on continuous curriculum, appropriate practice, work with families, and inclusion of special needs students has resulted in a dramatic reduction of retentions as well as special education referrals.

Developing a language focus:

Language development, in context, and emergent literacy are critical features of early childhood education, particularly for at-risk children. What does the school need to do to develop and/or enhance awareness of this curriculum facet?

This function was identified by the expert practitioners who have already engaged in the process of change as of critical immediacy. Schools must address this issue right away in their pursuit of early childhood practices. As noted above, resources from the field of whole language have been invaluable in spearheading such efforts. The reading program, often the core curricular area in schools, is frequently the first target of reconceptualization of assumptions and practice regarding young children and learning. One principal explained that whole language is extremely supportive of implementing early childhood practice because it is not organized around grade level the way basal texts are and it represents the continuity of curricular processes clearly. This curriculum approach nurtures change and offers support to teachers who may be prone to feeling overwhelmed or defensive.

5. Strategies for Developing New School Roles in Relation to Families

Family involvement and support is now recognized as a critical factor in the school-related success of children (Benard, 1991; Coleman, 1991; Committee for Economic Development (CED), 1991; Jewett, 1991; NASBE, 1988, 1991; Powell, 1989). Public school systems are engaged in developing new approaches towards their relationships with families and in developing "user-friendly", partnership approaches towards working with families. These roles include the promotion of involvement, empowerment, and support.

Parent/family involvement:

> *How are parents (intended to also refer to meaningful family members) expected and encouraged to become involved in their child's education by the school? What work does the school need to do to establish an atmosphere in which parents participate actively in the educational process?*

This function was identified as an area of high importance, high difficulty, and high immediacy by the expert practitioner panel. Barriers include traditional school attitudes towards parents, as well as parental reluctance, resistance or ignorance regarding the importance of this relationship, and social factors which actively discourage family abilities to become involved in school.

Identified strategies for dealing with this function include developing a positive (as opposed to critical or blaming) attitude towards parents, fostering avenues of communication, establishing collaborative relationships, understanding family members as a very valuable resource, and asking for, respecting, and utilizing parent input.

Ongoing staff development designed to study effective ways to understand and include parents in schooling processes is recommended. Expanding upon traditional concepts of the PTO or PTA as an organization and developing a diverse set of options for parent involvement have proven to be effective strategies. In one school which made parent involvement and support a major priority, "parent involvement" includes a Parent Club, a telephone answering system, a "Love, Lunch and Learn" program in which parents join their children for lunch monthly and discuss discipline concerns, school Fun Nights, and sharing sessions at the kindergarten level.

Principals report that information sessions scheduled for parents can be poorly attended. Sharing sessions, multicultural events, and child presentations have sometimes proven more successful. A principal who worked hard to develop an onsite preschool program acknowledged its very positive value in bringing families into the building. Open door policies, monthly parent coffees during daytimes and evenings, weekly evening family-centered school library story hours, parent information lending libraries, talent directories which specify available family expertise, parent staffed publication centers or other volunteer efforts, and provision of school-sponsored parent support staff are all strategies which have worked. Thank you notes and other acknowledgments of parent contributions are important. Equally, communication with parents around positive acknowledgments of their children is a very productive strategy--writing notes or phoning home to recognize good work, accomplishments, or positive behaviors. Providing child care services plays a significant role in enabling family members to become engaged in school activities, either as daytime volunteers or in attending evening events.

One program made a major commitment to parent involvement and designed a way of conducting home visits by pairs of school staff with all families. Those families who were uncomfortable meeting the school staff in their homes scheduled these visits in restaurants or other neutral places. By the second year of this project, the school had achieved 100% participation in these interactions, with an increase in the willingness of families to host these meetings in their own homes.

Many schools are also working to increase the number of parent conferences, particularly those districts currently limited to one conference per year, and to establishing earlier contacts with parents. Additionally, parent conferences are being reconceptualized as true exchanges: opportunities to gain valuable information from parents as well as to give information. Parents need to be encouraged to ask questions and share their depth of understanding about their children.

Parent/family empowerment:

> *A consistent factor in research on effective early childhood practice is that of parent involvement in decision-making. What do schools need to do in order to foster and invite the input of parents into significant decision-making opportunities regarding school functioning?*

Practitioners identified this area as one of high difficulty. One critical strategy would be that of designing and implementing technical assistance training for parents which would parallel the design and implementation of technical assistance for school staff. Families, then, can be encouraged to gain valuable skills at decision-making and problem-solving activities in relationship to schools.

Involvement of family representatives on advisory committees addressing such issues as grant writing, budget review, curriculum adoptions, discipline, Chapter 1, and sexuality/aids, have proven effective vehicles for family empowerment. Parent inclusion in school improvement projects or site based management teams is another crucial opportunity for empowerment. One school which lacked district support for implementing restructuring around early childhood concerns was careful to communicate with and review with all parents regarding the coming changes and the reasons for them. This also gave parents an opportunity to study, challenge, and endorse these changes, anchoring the school effort by providing local support.

Parents can and should be involved in development of vision, philosophy statements, and strategic planning. Methods should be designed which enable parents to contribute to the design of curriculum activities and materials, so that classrooms are assured of offering content and experiences which are personally and socially relevant to the students.

Family support:

> *Much recent evidence documents the erosion of family strengths and the need for more family support. What do schools need to provide in order to support family systems, for example, after school care, child care, recreation opportunities, comprehensive case management support, adult education or parenting classes?*

Many of the strategies adopted by schools in efforts to provide support for families are acknowledged above. Breakfast programs, preschool services, full day kindergarten, provision of before and after school care, summer boost or summer

school programs are also important forms of parent support. Providing child care during scheduled parent events, offering parenting skill or life management classes, workshop weekends, or career development opportunities are also valuable strategies. One school has a parent volunteer whose job it is to assist other parent volunteers in incorporating their volunteer expertise into their resumes. Other schools have a parent lounge on campus, stocked with relevant materials and information.

Integration of services is another way in which schools can provide family support. Combined comprehensive case management assists families in receiving continuity of service and support as they gain coping skills. Braiding funds (special education, Chapter 1) in creative ways has enabled some schools to hire social workers or family support workers who can assist in obtaining and distributing resources for families in need.

6. Strategies for Building Community Responsiveness

The connectedness of schools with communities is a theme which parallels that of family connectedness (CED, 1991; NASBE, 1991). Schools and communities benefit when communication flows both in and out of school regarding school, family, and community concerns and issues. Continuity is enhanced when community relevant goals and concerns are incorporated into the school curriculum and environment. How community concerns are represented in schools, how community concerns enter into school decision-making processes, and how communication, advocacy and support of schools are enhanced in the community are significant concerns for schools engaging in early childhood restructuring.

Community representation:

> *How can the school represent community features and concerns throughout school functioning? What needs to be done in order to make sure that community members interact with the school setting?*

Several strategies for encouraging interaction between the school and local community members have been developed by innovative educators. Business partnerships have been developed in which corporate or business members "adopt a classroom", eating lunch or visiting the class regularly and acknowledging good work. Mentor programs, in which children with particular needs are matched with community members who visit regularly, provide positive role modeling and assist the student and school in locating needed resources. One school invites a variety of community representatives to kindergarten snack time weekly to talk about their activities and skills with the kindergarten class. Another district has formed a business resource bank, in which members come and share their expertise with staff and students.

Integration efforts can increase community commitments. The combined case management approach, in which concerned agencies meet monthly to review the referral process as it affects particular families, provides a means of staying in touch with other community members and concerns. Equally, sharing inservice opportunities with family and youth service providers helps to bridge the gap between school and other community activities. Adopting a family strength model in which families are encouraged to define their own needs and supported through service providers to build on these strengths is a valuable strategy as well.

Establishing close ties with media sources, seeking contributions from local suppliers or purveyors of materials and resources, putting up children's art displays in community areas, having classrooms form partnerships with local nursing homes, ecology efforts, or meaningful community causes are also ways to increase community connectedness.

One school which serves a large population of Native Americans has reorganized its mode of curriculum planning to draw upon the expertise of its bilingual specialists. These staff members now assist other teachers in identifying the most culturally relevant curriculum materials and themes for use in their classrooms and are finding ways to encourage parents and other community representatives of Native American culture to contribute to school activities wherever possible.

Identifying the important stakeholders in the community, doing an authentic community needs assessment, and developing an advisory committee which is truly representative of the community and client population are valuable strategies to pursue.

Community decision-making:

How can the expertise of the community be elicited and put to use in the process of developing and implementing effective early childhood practice? What do schools need to do in order to give the community a significant role in determining the course of the school's progress?

Ranked as of low importance and high difficulty by the panel of expert practitioners, few strategies for dealing with community decision-making were identified by this research. One school in a very small district formed a "Key Communicators" group which includes representatives from the local police, hospital, businesses, and other community groups who need to stay in touch on a regular basis. This group assisted in identifying several projects which the school has continued to pursue, including a community newsletter, development of a videotape about the school, a student ambassador program and a reader board for internal materials. Other schools make efforts to include community representatives in school improvement efforts or on advisory committees.

One school district participated in a national early childhood study group sponsored by the Association for the Supervision of Curriculum Development. Team participation was required which included representation by central office staff, teaching staff, and a school board member. The work which this team did together led to an enhanced understanding and commitment on the part of the school board representative who then played a very facilitative role in pushing forward policies which could support the efforts of the district.

Community communication, advocacy, and school support:

What needs to be done in order to obtain the support and advocacy efforts of community members in sustaining school progress?

The expert practitioner panel ranked community advocacy as a highly difficult function and community communication as a highly immediate one. These concerns have been addressed in a few ways. As in the above discussion, schools can form community collaborative teams in order to form an advocacy plan. School-community collaborations around local issues can garner appreciation and support for school needs. Positive press relations, and mentor programs which bring community leaders and advocates on-site who can connect with school issues and

concerns, are additional ways of building community support and advocacy functions. Thoughtful and professional ways of communicating with the local school board are important strategies to pursue, as well. The foundations of this function are laid through the work of the parent and community involvement and empowering functions.

7. Strategies for Easing Transitions and Promoting Continuity for Children and Families

The relationship between childrens' school and family environments, as noted above, represents a significant variable in child success in school and is receiving increasing attention (U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1990). Promoting continuity and paying attention to the nature and number of transitions which children and families experience in relationship to schooling is becoming an important field of inquiry. How can and how have schools designed programs which respond to the issue of transition and continuity? Strategies for strengthening school-preschool relationships, providing preschool programs, and facilitating transitions for families are areas which have been explored.

School-preschool relationships:

What relationships need to be established and maintained between the school and other early childhood education providers in order to facilitate the effective transition of children from one program to another?

The understanding of the importance of facilitating effective transitions means that schools must move far beyond traditional activities such as Kindergarten Roundups or other orientation nights. Establishment of mutual respect between preschool and primary educators, shared staff development opportunities, collaborative committees which examine program or curricular continuities between preschool and primary school, mutual visits among preschool and kindergarten sites for administrators, teachers, and students, and careful transfer of records and significant information regarding child and family needs are some of the strategies being implemented to deal with this function.

Co-locating services is another strategy for improving school-preschool relationships. The school district, mentioned above in the section on facilities, which located a kindergarten program on site with teen parenting and Head Start facilities is adopting this approach. Another school has formed an Early Childhood Committee which monitors in-school programming and includes representatives from the local preschool settings as members of this advisory group.

Providing preschool programs:

What is the school's role in promoting continuity through close involvement with preschool programming and/or provision of preschool programs? What is needed to move in this direction?

School districts have taken a variety of approaches to addressing this issue. One district operates an early childhood center which offers three types of preschool programs on campus, including Head Start, state funded, and cooperative preschool classrooms, in addition to kindergarten through second grade. Another school, noted above, when unable to form a collaborative with the nearest Head Start providers, formed its own preschool program. Co-located services represent

another response to this type of concern. True collaborative ties between preschool and primary school systems can develop through some of the processes described above.

Facilitating transitions for families:

What do schools need to do in order to ease the transitions families must make between the different programs which serve their children?

Some schools are making efforts to provide the same kinds of services for families that are provided for children during a time of transition. Preparation, information exchange, and site to site visits can all be services to parents as well as to children. Preschool service providers can assist parents in identifying concerns and rights which they can articulate in their developing relationships with the public school system. All-school assemblies and other experiences such as immersion activities, visits to upcoming grade levels or buildings, and enhanced relationships between staff at different levels, can all assist children and families in their continuing transition experiences. Combined case management approaches also promote continuity of service for families.

In one school which serves a broad rural area and incorporates a number of Native American children who must come to stay in town in order to attend school, each child is assigned an "Auntie" or "Uncle" from the bilingual specialist staff who is able to speak that child's dialect and serves as a special friend. As noted previously, these staff members also provide important input into the curriculum design process so that classroom activities can be maximally responsive to these children's needs, among others.

8. Strategies for Improving Comprehensive Care for Children and Families

Comprehensive care represents a critical underpinning of successful outcomes for children. Children whose basic health, nutritional, or housing, safety and care needs are unmet are poor candidates for successful school performance. Further, families whose basic needs go unmet are less able to successfully meet the needs of the children in their care. Family-strengthening models for providing comprehensive care are therefore critical components of successful school-based early childhood centers. The issues of provision of comprehensive services and establishment of collaborative relationships need to be considered.

Comprehensive services:

How can schools contribute to service provision to families which is integrated, resource- and capacity-building, cost efficient, and preventive in nature? What new roles will schools have to take on and what resources will be needed to accomplish this goal?

Coordinated resource teams, combined case management and information sharing projects, home visiting models, "push in" integrated services for special needs children, and other approaches to resource coordination are vehicles for improved service provision. These approaches, however, must be developed in conjunction with a preventive, family strengthening model of support and service (Jewett et. al., 1991).

Co-location of social and educational services represents another valuable strategy for improved family-centered service integration. Braiding of funds, as mentioned earlier, can result in improved coordination for families, as well.

Collaborative relationships:

What needs to be done in order to establish close, effective working relationships with other local service providers? Who will do this?

Acknowledged as a high priority for immediate attention, the establishment of collaborative relationships is fostered in many ways identified through other functions addressed above. Identifying important community stakeholders and community resources, developing good communication flow in and out of the school, providing representation at collaborative efforts, and sponsoring family focused collaborations are all means to building this capacity. As a developing field of interest, collaboration and collaborative processes have been discussed and documented in several recent publications (Bruner, 1991; Cotton, 1991; Kagan, 1991; Melaville, 1991).

9. Strategies for Maintaining Quality Control

As noted above, innovation must be coupled with assessment in which programs monitor and refine practice based on careful assessment of outcomes. Children's school success remains the primary goal of the public school system, and changes in the system must focus on their effects on children and children's progress. The recent publication *Caring Communities* (NASBE, 1991) notes that "Good schools . . . move toward a philosophy of assessment that is continuous, based on children's performance, and directed by the teacher."(p. 35). Schools must consider the issues of how teachers and other school staff are to monitor the effects of their efforts and use this feedback to continuously improve program operations.

Self-evaluation and assessment of outcomes:

How able are staff to pay attention to the needs of children and families served and to their own strengths and limitations as professionals? How can these skills be enhanced at the appropriate level so that early childhood program quality can be monitored and continuously improved?

School processes in which staff have opportunities to examine their performance in a nonthreatening way and assess effects of teaching on children support a school improvement atmosphere. In one program, when first grade teachers saw improved writing skills in their entering students after kindergarten teachers began taking a more developmental approach, they began to actively support the school's shift towards developmentally appropriate practice. In another school, a survey which revealed children's lack of interest in using the academic skills they had obviously acquired provided the impetus for early childhood restructuring. Teachers who have the time and opportunity to reflect, question and assess their teaching practices and results are more open to the possibilities for improvement.

Strategies which enable teachers to discuss and consider the impact of their methods, collect meaningful information on the effectiveness of school functions, and analyze the information they gain, will strengthen early childhood restructuring processes.

Outcomes focus:

What forms of information do schools need to obtain and use in assessing quality early childhood education design and implementation? What roles and resources must be deployed in order to obtain this information?

Student assessment becomes a major concern for schools which are engaged in innovative practices with young children. Norm-referenced standardized tests, although not recommended by specialists in developmentally appropriate practices for children 0 through 8 (Kamii, 1990; Meisels, 1989) have a strong impact on public perceptions of school success. The panel of expert practitioners identified this as a critical area of high difficulty in the ongoing implementation of early childhood centers. Innovative practices must be supported by evidence of success.

Strategies for dealing with the collection of authentic and meaningful information about student progress include exploration of the following modes of assessment: observation of student behaviors, anecdotal records, parent and child interviews, skills and developmental checklists, teacher-made assessments, portfolio use, teacher journals, learning logs and reader responses, and surveys of students, teachers, and families (Arter, 1990; Southern Association on Children Under Six, 1991). Devising methods for acquiring and analyzing these new types of information is a continuing challenge which impacts the school-based early childhood center. Equally, designing ways in which identified outcomes can be used to influence and refine instructional methods represents an additional challenge.

Reporting outcomes becomes a critical factor as well. Some schools are revising reporting procedures, rejecting letter grades for their youngest students and using descriptive comments instead. Finding ways to make meaningful formats for describing and analyzing progress represents another challenge in the assessment realm.

Program evaluation:

How do school-based early childhood centers assess the effectiveness of their program design? What tools and resources are needed to monitor program function in ways that will contribute to efficacy and successful outcomes?

Expert practitioners are actively seeking support and materials in order to effectively deal with this function. Hiring a consultant to do a program review is one alternative, albeit a potentially expensive one. Self review can be considered, particularly if staff empowerment processes enable this work to be a shared concern. Some documents are currently available or under development which can facilitate the pursuit of program evaluation for school-based early childhood centers (Alaska Department of Education et.al., 1991; Bredekamp, 1984; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1990).

10. Strategies for Administration Which Supports Early Childhood Restructuring

Restructuring is most successful in an environment which provides contextual support. Policies and procedures can help or hinder efforts to improve practices. Strategies having to do with leadership, administrative supports, and board development were all identified by expert practitioners as having a significant impact on the process of changing practice.

Leadership:

What forms of leadership do schools need in order to make these types of changes? What are the different leadership roles which enter into restructuring around early childhood education and who can/should play such roles? How can an administrative system effectively support the development of these types of leadership?

This issue has been identified as of high importance and high immediacy by the panel of expert practitioners. The extent of the changes involved in systemic early childhood restructuring are so broad that they must be managed, coordinated and monitored by an effective leader.

The regional survey revealed some consistent themes or strategies which effective principals used in their efforts to pursue early childhood practices: participatory management styles, strong interest in research as it relates to school improvement, capabilities at engaging staff in this research and its application, attentiveness to and respect for the variety of expressed staff capabilities and concerns, flexibility in thinking about children, staff, families, and community, good communication networks and methods, and an "inclusive" style. Leadership which serves to motivate teachers to take risks while also respecting and protecting staff limitations were acknowledged as important qualities. Mutual trust is critical. The leader's role as a buffer, in protecting staff from too much adversity or discouragement, and as a motivator, were highlighted. Recognizing and nurturing leadership capabilities among staff members contributes to school progress. Personal involvement with and knowledge about the kinds of innovations and changes the school staff are making is critical for effective school leaders.

Leadership strategies interact with many of the other issues previously addressed, including empowerment of staff, families, and communities, and all organizational features.

Administrative supports:

What kinds of administrative support do schools need in order to initiate and sustain the kinds of changes outlined? What kinds of administrative structures and strategies are effective in enabling the provision of such supports?

State level support for early childhood restructuring has had a significant impact on school change. State sponsored early childhood primary teacher networks, developmentally appropriate practices self study groups, conferences, and grant opportunities which nurture innovation and experimentation are very valuable contributions to the potential for successful restructuring. State level consideration of and resource deployment for policy and guidelines which influence early childhood restructuring are very valuable forms of support. For example, state department of education reviews of assessment practices or program review, or guidelines for implementation of ungraded primaries, are resources which schools can make immediate use of.

District offices can also play a significant role in nurturing and sustaining school change. District level task forces, establishment and dissemination of professional libraries and resources, sponsorship of early childhood seminars, conferences, and study groups, and support and endorsement of innovation provide seminal functions. District guidelines for curriculum design, implementation, and accountability

measures can encourage or deter schools from making changes. Teacher input into these processes, ensuring that some representatives have strong early childhood expertise, is a useful strategy for making policies and guidelines supportive. Flexibility in funding allocations, which enables schools to make locally appropriate decisions regarding purchases of materials and services, can foster growth. Focusing district sponsored school improvement efforts on early childhood restructuring is another possible strategy. Educational service districts can play a significant role in this area.

Board development:

What types of development need to occur in order to build awareness and support among school board and potential school board representatives? What can districts do to promote appreciation for and understanding of these types of issues?

Schools attempting major changes fail to thrive unless they receive the backing and support of their governing bodies. The kinds of empowerment processes and community involvements described in prior sections play critical roles in the process of building a support base for early childhood restructuring. Developing a sound, well substantiated plan for change is a key element in presenting and promoting school improvement efforts. As one principal said "We maintain a high level of professionalism during the change and communicate that". Staff can be encouraged to develop skills at articulating the change in methods as well as the rationale underlying those changes. Equally, staff can be encouraged to communicate this knowledge base in appropriate and timely fashion to encourage understanding and buy in.

Next Steps

The school-based early childhood centers project intends to respond to the regional needs of schools as they implement the early childhood center as part of their structure.
This documentation of strategies will be discussed and analyzed by the panel of professional educators who have already demonstrated proficiency in implementing early childhood centers in public schools. Specific types of technical assistance will be developed in response to this analysis.

The early childhood centers project will continue to identify and refine strategies and resources for effective implementation of the early childhood center in public schools. A guidebook will be developed which will: (1) profile study sites; (2) clarify the common elements and strategies which schools have employed successfully; and (3) characterize the uniquenesses of each program. In addition, the project will identify resources and develop technical assistance capacities for assisting interested districts in developing their own early childhood centers.

This work will be coupled with research into policy issues associated with the implementation of early childhood centers. Expert practitioners will work with regional representatives in the policy arena to identify the barriers and bridges to effective implementation. Networking and cadre development techniques will enhance the potential for dissemination of these strategies and resources. Ultimately, these areas of work are intended to increase regional capacity for the early childhood center concept.

NWREL's Child, Family, and Community Program welcomes the opportunity to continue to work closely with regional educators in exploring the early childhood center concept and practice and in contributing to progress in this very important field of endeavor.

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Appendix 1

These are expert practitioner ratings of issues according to **importance**, **difficulty**, and **immediacy** of these issues in regards to implementing a school-based early childhood center.

High*	Controversial**	Low*
IMPORTANCE		
Vision and philosophy (U)***	Class groupings	Facilities
Staff empowerment and decision-making (U)***	Providing comprehensive services	Responding to special needs
Implementation of DAP (U)***		Community decision-making
Motivation		
View of children and families		
Staff self-evaluation		
Teacher flexibility and willingness to change		
Staff development		
Curriculum innovation		
Developing a language focus		
Parent/Family involvement		
Administrative leadership		
DIFFICULTY		
Facilities	Vision and philosophy	Salaries
Finances	View of children and families	Community representation
Staff self-evaluation	Providing preschool programs	Establishing preschool-school relationships
Parent involvement		Administrative leadership
Parent empowerment		
Community decision-making		
Community communication, advocacy, and school support		
Outcomes focus		
IMMEDIACY		
Vision and philosophy (U)***	Facilities	Performance evaluation
View of children and families (U)***	Class groupings	Community decision-making
Staff empowerment (U)***	School-preschool relationships	Facilitating transitions for families
Staff development (U)***	Outcomes focus	Providing comprehensive services
Implementation of DAP	Board development	
Developing a language focus		
Parent involvement		
Community communication, advocacy, and school support		
Establishing collaborative relationships		
Administrative leadership		
Administrative support		

*Represent agreement among four or more of the seven practitioners. **Ratings in which several raters ranked an issue highly and others ranked it as being low. ***Represents unanimity.

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- Developing and disseminating effective educational products and procedures
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- Providing technical assistance in educational problem solving
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